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A Journal as Multi-Level Plaza for Research in Arts Education

Expanding Communal and Personal Experiences

The inauguration of the *International Journal for Research in Cultural, Aesthetic, and Arts Education* is a cause for reflection as well as celebration. It is a cliché, but also a deep truth, that the arts have been with us for as long as human history. Similarly, inquiry and its natural extension, education, have been integral to the human condition and spirit. Underlying all three domains – arts, inquiry, and education – is our ability and aspiration as a species to reach out to others. The intersection of these three domains – research in arts education – is predominantly associated with institutional venues for research. Academic journals function as settings for reaching out and fulfill an essential role in this enterprise, creating a space that crosses the borders of individual disciplines in arts education and promoting a communal and personal interchange.

Serving as a multi-level plaza, the journal provides a meeting place for the curated display, exchange and elaboration of ideas on multiple levels: (i) The “undercover” level, consisting of the exchange between authors and reviewers; (ii) the visible level of published papers; and (iii) the personal and experiential processes that each of us brings to the interaction with published papers, invisible yet key to the whole endeavor. In our multiple and overlapping roles as writers, reviewers and readers, we are presented with an opportunity to listen, dialogue, and partake in a broader community.

Explorations underlying domains of the arts, education, and research focus on the outside world. Still, the realization that our *inner* lenses shape our knowledge and capacity to understand the world has been core to traditions as broadly sourced as Asian Buddhist worldview and Greek philosophy 2500 years ago. The subsequent marginalization of inner academic discourse can be traced to the authority of religious dogma, followed by the Enlightenment’s reaction against this dogma – a reaction that generated the positivist tradition and its emphasis on objective reality.

Recognition of the power of inner processes re-emerged during the latter part of the 19th century in the arts, where the personal, subjective perspective of the artist was forcefully expressed in post-impressionistic art. At the same time, concepts of the human sciences emerged in the academic disciplines of philosophy and psychology, attending to relationships between the intentionality of mental and external actions; highlighting the unique and the momentary; and relating to human values and personal meaning. In particular, the work of William Dilthey, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger laid foundations for human and social sciences and for new research methodologies. Aided by the field-based methods of anthropology and its academic status, new methodological practices were slowly introduced and even more slowly, with a great deal of initial resistance, accepted into social science research. The 1990s witnessed a proliferation of methodological orientations including phenomenological, interpretivist, and social constructivist worldviews (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; van Manen, 1990). The emergence of arts-based and artistic research starting in the mid 1990s (e.g., Belliveau, 2007; Bickel, Irwin & Siegesmund, 2022; Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995; Bresler, 2005; Barone & Eisner, 1997; Irwin & De Cosson, 2004; McNiff, 1998; Schiesser, 2015; Visse, Hansen & Leget, 2019), and innovative models for doctorates in artistic research and studio arts, for example, the European-based Creator Doctus Constellation, has brought arts, education, and inquiry ever closer. The rich and at times tense dynamics between the humanities and the social sciences, has been a productive presence in this emerging literature.

If the creator's inner self is now recognized as essential to creation in both the arts and the social sciences worlds, the arena of public schooling, since its inception in the 19th century, has focused to a great extent on external facts and (typically simplified) measurements. Importantly, eloquent theories and practices highlighting the self-cultivation of the individual, from Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and the German *Bildung* movement of the 18th century to progressive and open education theories and practices of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, had an important presence. In particular, the discipline of visual art education had its key advocates (e.g., Lowenfeld, 1947) and a remarkable impact on school art in the 1950s and the 1960s, with a lasting presence to this day. Other innovative, progressive voices included Peter Slade (1954) in drama education and, later, Susan Stinson (1982) in dance education. However, in the curriculum revolution that swept all disciplines in the USA during the post-Sputnik era of the early 1960s, later extending to other parts of the world, school arts were prompted to justify their presence by articulating rationales and *raison d'être* highlighting the (often oversimplified) cognitive, knowledge-based and measurable aspects of development. Indeed, school arts, for the most part, tended to fit with the general academic curriculum in terms of structure, pedagogical style, and evaluation practice. Still, the arts' capacity to attend to the expression of inner life has provided some balancing perspective on expressive and affective elements, complementing the outward-based academic curriculum (Bresler, 1994).

Education, of course, is larger than formal schooling. Various educational arenas, including community-based cultural centers and museums, are characterized by richly diverse curricular and pedagogical orientations. Research in arts education has increasingly turned to informal settings where the arts are being practiced (e.g., Bolin, Blandy & Congdon, 2000; Higgins, 2012; Jackson, 2000; Turino, 2008), enriching visions, missions, and possibilities.

One of the distinct features of the *International Journal for Research in Cultural, Aesthetic, and Arts Education* is the inclusion of all arts disciplines, attending to the aesthetic and cultural. The respective communities of music, visual arts, dance, and drama each have their own venues and specific conferences, journals and publications. Obviously, boundaries have useful roles. Still, there is great value in bringing together communities that share underlying values and commitments. This journal joins a small group intended to provide space for all the arts, starting with the pioneering *Arts Education Policy Review*, established in 1899, and, a hundred years later, the online free access *International Journal of Education and Arts*. While the new multidisciplinary *International Journal for Research in Cultural, Aesthetic, and Arts Education* aims to host diverse disciplinary communities, it is an open question whether this disciplinarity co-existence will result in explicit dialogical perspectives (for example, in “making the strange familiar and the familiar strange” lens that has guided me in my own case studies of arts education (e.g., Bresler, 1996) or whether it will feature bounded, separate disciplines within a larger publication (Bresler, 2007).

There are major differences among the goals, traditions, and practices of different arts disciplines. In the past, music has kept stronger (though not impenetrable) boundaries, at least in the West¹. Paralleling the artworlds, school arts often maintain hard boundaries across individual arts disciplines. Even when the whole school mission centers around integration of the arts with each other and with the academic curriculum – and where visual arts, dance and drama are key players in integration – classical (but not folk or jazz) music has remained segregated (Bresler, 2003).

As participants in the multi-level plaza, we are invited to listen attentively to the ideas encountered in papers as well as to ourselves in a dialogue of thought. With intensified academic rhythms and increasing abundance of research, it's possible to forget this kind of listening. Still, the power of great art, great education, and great scholarship is that it can stop us in our tracks and move us in unexpected ways. As authors, academic research reflects our commitment to be aware of existing scholarship and to contribute to it, in consonance or dissonance, addressing blank and blind spots. This can involve lengthy cycles of focusing on the inner, the outer, and the relationship between. Our research projects reflect not just our knowledge and skills, but as importantly, our spirit and inner compasses, what we hold dear and deeply meaningful.

¹ Important, well-known global examples of integration of the arts include the high arts of Noh and Kabuki, Chinese and Western operas, and the participatory arts of African cultures.

In this process, listening carefully to ourselves is essential. We shape our research, lingering with it, giving it extended time and attention, and in the process of lingering, are shaped by it (Bresler, 2008). I hope for the journal to support such a listening experience. On this occasion of its inauguration, I wish us all wise listening and lively interaction in expanding our perceptions of a richly complex aesthetic world.

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